Palestinians Across Borders: Shifting Relations to Locality and Community

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The phenomenon of diasporization has received a great deal of scholarly attention as an epitome of globalization and for its impact on cultural production. Diasporas are considered by some as "exemplary communities of the transnational moment" (Tölölyan 1991: 5), while others see diasporas as the sites for the production of new forms of culture that in the future will replace or transcend the cultures of nation-states (Appadurai 1996).

Traditionally, the classical diasporas, such as those of Greeks, Jews and Armenians, were communities that had been scattered across various foreign territories. In the current moment of increased interest in transnational formations and movements, the term diaspora is used to describe diverse transnational communities, migrants, expatriates, refugees or guest workers (Tölölyan 1991: 4-5) and there is no consensus on its definition. Clifford argues that the historical model of classical diasporas "can be taken as non-normative starting points for a discourse that is traveling or hybridizing in new global conditions" (1997: 306). Safran (1991: 83-84) has proposed a far more stringent conception of diaspora, insisting on such criteria as dispersal to more than one place, continued attachment to that place, sustained memory and longing for the homeland, group solidarity in relation with the homeland, and a sense of alienation in the host society. Despite the variety of definitions, which cannot be wholly reconciled, some consensus can be traced around specific characteristics, as underscored by Werbner (2000 : 6-7) : diasporas exhibit social heterogeneity; cling to memory and history; retain a dual or multiple orientation towards the place of settlement (where they seek some form of integration), towards other locales where the dispersed communities live, and sustain transnational links and allegiances with them as well as the homeland; and finally, diasporas are often implicated in nation-state building projects.

Palestinian communities as diasporic social spaces

Defining Palestinian communities living in exile as a diaspora can be seen as problematic. Some Palestinians may perceive such a label as endangering their right of return, in the sense that the term could cunningly imply their definitive settlement outside of their homeland (Kodmani Darwish 1997). On the other hand it can be seen as usurping by those who consider that the term can only legitimately refer to the Jewish diaspora. Secondly because it implies the rootedness, a place of origin, it contradicts the common Zionist perception of the falseness and illegitimacy of Palestinian national feelings. However, if we invoke the constitutive features enunciated before, Palestinians can be considered a diaspora (Safran 1991; Cohen 1997). In particular, two main characteristics of diasporic spaces are constitutive elements of the Palestinian experience: the centrality of the homeland in the

diaspora's political, social and cultural activities and representations, and the multiple ties and loyalties that are constructed between scattered communities living in different locations. Diaspora is thus useful as a concept relating the many cultural and political processes involved in the constitution and reproduction of these social formations.

Diasporas are composed of historically and geographically situated communities, who benefit from and are limited by resources of specific localities in their economic, cultural and social dimensions. This outlines the necessity not to underestimate the context in which these communities are formed and transformed, since the real forms they take are to a large extent induced by mechanisms of accommodation with and resistance to local settings (Clifford 1997: 251). Hence diasporas can empirically demonstrate the relevance of locality in the study of transnational formations (Smith and Guarnizo 1998: 11).

Members of diasporas combine transnational social ties and some level of connectivity to the homeland, with settlement in a local context. They take part in transnational politics, cultural and social interactions with the homeland, and national affairs in the host society. They are familiar with two or more cultural and social locations, yet rarely fully feel at home anywhere (Said 1984, 1990). The social, political and cultural transactions they engage in involve communities and institutions that reach beyond the borders of a nation-state. These phenomena are often mentioned in celebratory terms in the literature (Appadurai 1996) as evidences of the subversion of local attachments by transnational flows. Is that to say that "we need to think ourselves beyond the nation" as Appadurai (1993: 411) would suggest? I shall argue in this essay that diasporic identities and diasporas' cultural transactions demonstrate the continued relevance of national and local attachments, through material and symbolic national construction in a transnational space and cultural resistance occurring sometimes in physical disconnection with the homeland. In this perspective, diasporic formations do not announce the end of national, ethnic nor local ties but rather suggest the existence of specific forms of national attachment and relations to a community that span over the borders of the homeland and host countries.

Brah's concept of diaspora space (1996) draws on Clifford's traveling culture (Clifford 1992) where boundaries and the position of the native are contested (Brah 1996: 209). The problem with the conception of culture as fluid and in constant displacement is that it down plays social mechanisms of rootedness and boundedness that can coexist in a diaspora with tendencies to fluidity and border crossing. The interest of Brah's definition lies in the assumed importance of the notion of relationality between economic, cultural and political processes, their entanglement in structures of power and the subject's position in these configurations (*ibid.* 182). In the perspective adopted here, diasporic social spaces alternatively suggest that the relation to home, the community and the territory can be identified in the tensions between processes of fluidity and closure, boundary setting and transgression, as they constitute a great deal of social transactions occurring among diasporic communities. Relations to home and the community, the forging of a group identity by processes of inclusion and exclusion articulate in specific modes of identification and practices. The national attachment as it is constituted in a diaspora relates to the tensions, conflicts and negotiations emerging from subjects' and groups' positioning in their relation to the community and the homeland. Processes of construction and transformation of physical and symbolic ties to different social, cultural and political spaces have hence to be looked at in their articulations with specific dimensions of power, such as class, gender or generation.

I will address these questions to the Palestinian case, exploring the relationship between notions of displacement and rootedness in the making of the material and symbolic attachments to the homeland. This analysis will be developed within a general discussion on rootedness and hybridity. The relationship to the homeland will be considered as a historically constructed set of representations and social practices depending on resources available and on the subjects' positions in structures of power, such as class, gender or generation. Ethnographic evidences of communities oriented towards cultural preservation, and others towards identity politics and cosmopolitanism will highlight heterogeneity and the phenomenon of cultural polarization occurring in the diaspora.

Scrutinizing tensions between locality and transnationality

The positions assumed by some anthropologists in interaction with postcolonial studies raise issues of great interest and many implications in the current debate in transnational studies (Gupta and

Ferguson 1992; Appadurai 1993). According to these authors, social practices, persons, ideas and commodities are no longer embedded in local contexts, but rather circulate along flux and networks (Clifford 1992, 1997; Appadurai 1993). Clifford argues for the prevalence of movement over rooting in the making of human societies and suggests that cultural production and meaning have always been engendered by displacement (1997: 3). In this approach, the concept of culture is redefined through a shift from the local to the transnational, where hybrid cultural forms challenge the traditional anthropological object characterized by purity and closure. But it is not at all clear that transnational relations generate such hybridity rather than creating new forms of bounded cultural identity (Friedman 2002b). Existing evidence of transnational social formations both past and present would indicate that the latter may indeed be the case (Friedman 1994; Vertovec 1999 : 447). In detailed long term studies, Glick Schiller and other contributors to transnational studies have given evidence of the immigrants' links and allegiance to their homeland, using the concept of "transnation" (Glick Schiller and Fouron 1990, 2001; Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Basch et al. 1994).

However, the discourse on diasporas and transnational social formations has become the discourse of movement, hybridity and border crossing (Hall 1990; Gilroy 1993; Bhabha 1994; Appadurai 1996), while reference to locality in the making of identities has been rejected as irrelevant for the study of diasporas. A terminology centered on the notions of hybridity, third space (Bhabha 1994), in-betweenness (Gilroy 1993), seeks to account for the fluidity and unboundedness of identity. Indeed, diasporas are celebrated as the new forms *par excellence* of these deterritorialized, hyphenated identities, where relationship to space location is dislocated, and self-definition in constant motion. The actual relevance of these concepts and processes to an ongoing case of identity construction will be addressed in the context of the Palestinian diaspora, but it will be useful to state at the outset that this essay takes a theoretical stance that marks its distance from the claims noted above. My ethnographic findings among Palestinian communities in Britain indicate that a great deal of the resources of that specific diaspora is invested in the construction and perpetuation of all sorts of ties and loyalties towards the homeland and the community. Other studies have demonstrated the long-standing implication of the Palestinian diaspora since the exile of 1948 in the development of an apparatus of institutions and political organizations to further a national struggle (Brand 1988). Against the argument of open-ended global flows as unique sites of identity and cultural practices (Meyer and Geschiere 1999), supposed to characterize transnational cultural forms, my research findings highlight processes of definition and persistence of boundaries as important aspects of identity construction in the diaspora. However, being on the move surely characterizes the Palestinian condition, and the Palestinian identity has been to a great extent forged and transformed through the many episodes of displacements that have marked the Palestinian national history. Hence these two phenomena - movement and boundedness - do not necessarily contradict one another in social practice. They can coexist in tension with one another and understanding can best be attained by addressing them in their dialectical relation rather than in a theoretical opposition.

The making of the Palestinian diaspora

Before 1948, Palestinian nationalism integrated older allegiances and belongings, both local (tribal, family and village-based) and transnational (Arabic culture and Islam) (Khalidi 1997: 147). Since the *Nakba*[1], The memory of the expulsion and the occupation of the homeland have forged the strong centrality of locality and territory in the diaspora's identity. The experience of loss and marginalization is a strong cement in the feeling to belong to a people, and reinforces the distinctiveness of the Palestinian national consciousness throughout countries in which exiles have been dispersed (Christison 1989; Sayigh 1994; Lindholm Schultz & Hammer 2003; Shiblak 2005). This experience is the cornerstone of a shared memory, national symbols, and a common political will. Palestinians have a strong sense of a shared ethnic and national identity lying in a common history of traumatic uprooting from the homeland, commemorated as the *Nakba*, and a common struggle for the recognition of civil and national rights and the search for statehood.

The experience of displacement and movement for Palestinians has historically been based on the traumatic uprooting from one's homeland and the ensuing relentless discrimination and denial of their national identity they have suffered in their various places of settlement (Shiblak 1996). The Palestinian experience of exile is marked by feelings of dislocation, displacement, and uprootedness. The Arabic term often used by my informants to describe this situation, *ghurba*[2], captures the depth of the alienation and suffering endured while being separated from the homeland. Additionally, subaltern

positions ascribed by host countries tend to contribute to the community's entrenchment and to the subsequent process in which Palestinians categorize others as they are themselves negatively categorized. Consequently, the relation to home and the maintaining of roots have been the main focus of community formation in the Palestinian diaspora. A great deal of material and symbolic resources is mobilized both locally and in transnational practices to commemorate home and preserve the distinctiveness of the group's identity in the perspective of return to a situation considered as normal, i.e. the physical return and the creation of a nation-state. To do so, processes of differentiation of the community from 'others', cultural closure and strong defense of the community boundaries are matter of national survival in a stateless condition, a processes Said referred to as "the least attractive aspects of being in exile" (1984: 51). This experience has little to do with notions of identity as invention, travel, and hybridity that pervade the literature on globalization. Even though such phenomena are observed among Palestinians, one should carefully address the issues of displacement and dislocation when dealing with this population since they refer to Palestinian national history and are imbued with specific political and existential meanings. They pertain to the Palestinian collective memory and national narratives of loss, uprootedness and exile.

I suggest that notions of displacement and hybridity should not be understood as essential properties of transnational social spaces but rather be contextualized in the political and social fields in which they emerge, where the relevance of categories of differentiation such as gender, generation or class have to be addressed. In other words, there is a need to interrogate the social and symbolic resources involved, and the way the subject is positioned in a social or political field. How do individual and collective identities articulate in these specific structures of power? What do they reveal of the actors' experience in the world and representation of the world, their social and cultural dispositions? I would argue that these specific relations to the world are more expressive of a subject's position in the global and local structures of power than an intrinsic property of cultural formations in the global age (Friedman 2002b).

The Palestinian diaspora in the United Kingdom

Following the creation of the State of Israel, two-thirds of the Palestinian population living in historical Palestine was made homeless and dispersed to neighbouring countries. It is estimated that there were more than seven millions Palestinian refugees and displaced persons in the world at the beginning of 2003[3]. According to Shiblak (2005) there are around 186 000 Palestinians living in Europe and 20 000 currently residing in the UK. After the first wave of Palestinian civil servants and students who migrated in the fifties, the majority of Palestinians in Britain have been professionals and students who arrived since the sixties and the seventies from the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Lebanon as a consequence of the 1967 Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and the civil war in Lebanon. This new political context led to worsened Palestinians' legal, social and economic conditions both in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Arab host countries (Shiblak 2005). Throughout the years, an increasing number of refugees and stateless Palestinians have migrated to European countries including the UK, fleeing political turmoil in the Middle East. This situation has created a divide in the diaspora between two broadly defined groups: the well-established and integrated communities and the majority - on the increase - less successful migrant communities that include refugees and other stateless Palestinians (*ibid.:* 15). As a consequence of these migration patterns, Palestinian communities in the UK are very diverse in terms of social class, cultural background, civil and legal status, place of origin and political and religious leaning.

These differences have hindered initiatives of creating Palestinian community organizations. Associations such as the Association of Palestinian Communities in the UK (APCUK) do not get much support. Other efforts to set up community organizations in Manchester and Glasgow have failed, obstructed by community disinterest and internal dissensions and conflicts. Many Palestinians interviewed on this issue invoked the impossibility of achieving representativeness for communities that are so highly heterogeneous. A conversation with young laborers in London has revealed that they did not consider the APCUK as representative of Palestinians. The idea itself of the creation of a community seemed to them impossible, and was perceived as the manifestation of the elite's arrogance:

> These people are interested in people like them, upper class. They don't represent other Palestinians. The idea of making a community here is impossible, it can't work. We are all

different; we come from different places. (Ihab, London, May 2005)

As many diasporas, Palestinians display both homogeneity and heterogeneity. The internal differentiation highlighted here reflects the dual orientation of diasporas, defined as the opposition between parochial nationalism and cosmopolitan transnationalism (Tölölyan 2000), which underlies the tension between processes of hybridization and indigenization in diasporic discourses and practices. As suggested by Friedman, these processes are expressions of the ongoing cultural fragmentation and class polarization taking place in the contemporary world-system in an era of intense globalization (Friedman 2002a, 2002b, 2004).

Transmigrants and 'ethnic' transnationals

When asked the question: "where is your home?", Palestinians answer: "Palestine". Some will add: "*All* Palestine". However, cultural and social practices reveal more locally embedded attachments, in reference to the family and community of friends back home, in the village, the town, or the neighborhood. Social and economic activities in relation to the place of origin - visits, communication, attendance to weddings, funerals, sending of remittances, house construction and business activities - are primarily related to a localized area, generally the city of origin.

Displaced Palestinians and refugees focus symbolically on the place of origin, in their commemorations, narratives of uprooting, in their memory and representations of return. Feelings of dispossession, nostalgia and mental reconstruction of a pre-1948 past are mostly linked to locations as the house and the village, the land owned by the family and the landscape. Pilgrimages to destroyed villages are part of collective and familial rituals of remembrance and were reported as vivid memories by Asʿad who was born in Jabalya refugee camp:

> We used to go to Al Majdal until 1988. We had relatives to visit, my family and my uncle's family. We used to go to the sea full day… they used to do it before *Al Nakbe*. There was a grave of a sheikh, we went to say Al *Fatiha*[4]. The grave was near the beach. We cooked *mashwi*[5], it was nice. (Asʿad, Manchester, 23 August 2004)

A student from Jordan reports his first visit to Palestine as a strong re-rooting experience:

> We went to our land. Palestine is a beautiful place. We met our family in West Bank. Most of them for the first time. We went all the family together. The goal of my dad was for us to have a strong connection with Palestine (...) Because your land is much more beautiful than life in *ghurba*, it made me much more connected and much more angry of being expelled. (Khaled, Manchester, 11 August 2004)

Palestinians who have the resources (possibility to get a visa, or possession of a European or US passport) visit regularly their country of origin. When physical contact is limited or impossible, they nevertheless sustain dense ties through phone calls, the daily use of email, chat and webcam, interacting with relatives and friends generally scattered in various locations. The consumption of medias (Arabic newspapers such as Al Quds, satellite channels such as Abu Dhabi, Al Jazeera) tends to shape a common political consciousness and is another mean to stay in contact with the country of origin and more widely Middle East affairs.

Social and economic solidarity networks

Many Palestinians sustain close social and economic relationship with the family back home, supporting economically the extended family of several brothers, sisters and cousins. The pressure such responsibility puts on individuals gives them no other choice than to be economically successful. Success does not only concerns the individual but the all community he is related to:

> I have all my family who is catching me here [showing his throat] I can't not succeed. I have to support all of them. I have to earn a lot of money. (Ali, London, 13 February 2005)

Ali, a young entrepreneur in his thirties, exemplifies the 'economic transnational', always on the move and benefiting economic opportunities of distant locations. Arrived in London in the nineties from Hebron, he imports goods from Palestine and sells them on the British market. He has developed a successful business in both countries, and in Dubai where he has invested in estate.

Economic purposes along with the search for more secure legal and civil status have pushed young Palestinians like Ali to try they chance in Europe, in a worsened situation of discrimination and turmoil in the Arab countries in these last twenty years. Their migration is part of an economic

strategy of sustaining the family back home. Young males are sent to the UK, - and especially to London, considered as the heart of the country economy - to work or to get graduated from university. Family and social connections in the country of destination play an important role in the integration and adaptation processes of the newcomers and in the formation of chain migrations. Successful transnationals like Ali are often the backbone of solidarity networks. Ali and his cousins and uncles who have migrated at different periods since the seventies provide the social and cultural resources to newcomers, administrative information, employment, - often in ethnic market such as groceries, restaurants or businesses run by Palestinians from Hebron -, accommodation, and ultimately insertion in a close-knit Palestinian community. Support is provided not only to family members but also to other Palestinians who migrated individually, including unprivileged refugees with low professional qualifications and poor command in English who would have little chance to integrate in the British society and economic market without the community support. The community is a haven, providing the opportunity of feeling at home, and vital resources for migrants in a situation of high economic competition and cultural and social estrangement. The shelter of a comfortable community is sometimes adopted by newly arrived students. In the absence of a family, organizations can play the role of welcoming, informing, supporting Palestinian students in their administrative needs, and offer them the opportunity to socialize in a Palestinian community, as it has been observed in Manchester General Union of Palestinian Students. Being far from one's family is indeed a difficult experience that is often referred to as liberating but yet a source of loneliness and social alienation.

Social entrenchment and cultural resistance

Although the professionals and to some extend laborers are with more or less success economically integrated, they nevertheless tend to have limited contact with the British cultural and social environment. These tendencies tend to be less salient among the younger generation, where the importance of personal choice and subjectivity seems to play an important part, but the observation is still relevant for the first generation, the lower classes and the refugees, especially in situations where the individual is socially or economically discriminated.

The conditions of migration and the legal status that will determine greatly the opportunities in the country of settlement and the possibility of movement are as well important factors. Among Palestinians arrived in the seventies from the Occupied Palestinian Territories, many of them have lost their residency rights as a consequence of the Six-Day war, and are so far unable to return to their original city. In that context, life in exile can be seen as temporary, as a burden made of uprooting and estrangement, and the hope to return is expressed more or less bitterly. Munir was a student in Britain during the Six-Day war and became stateless, prevented from returning to Hebron after the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. When asked how they felt in Britain, his wife and her female friends kept repeating and lamenting:

> We don't belong here....We are here because of occupation. We really miss our country. We want to go back home but we can't because of the occupation.

Hind had to follow her husband, a professional who came to Britain for a postdoctoral position and has lived in exile so far, unable to set up his professional situation in Palestine. Hind's twenty years of waiting for return have turned her life into an existential prison:

> I always think to go back. I've always hoped the children would like to go back, because I don't want to die here. I'm here with my husband because he's got a job here….but … [hesitating] the more the time goes… [with lassitude] we start first for the education, then the children grow, now for the university. (Hind, Manchester, 21 October 2004)

Hind's husband criticizes his wife's "conservatism" and is critical towards Palestinians who want to preserve cultural purity in exile. He tolerates his daughter having a boyfriend and accepts the eventuality of his children marrying with non-Palestinians. He conceptualizes the distance with one's culture as the core of the experience of a diaspora:

> I think we have to accept the reality, we live in a new society. If you come to this country and live in it, you have to integrate, as far as you can, but at the same time, keep your values. (…) I don't mean you have to

> escape from your origin, you know as I said before I am proud to be Palestinian. (…) You have to take the good from both. (Mohammad, Manchester, 14 February 2005)

Palestinians adopt different responses to the challenges of adaptation. They preserve diverse levels of endosociality and endogamy and most of them will show great concern in preserving what their consider Arab cultural traits, Muslim values and connection to Palestine. Maps of the country and of the city of origin often adorn the walls of their houses. Speaking Arabic as unique language in interactions, consuming Arab food - spices, herbs, bread, olives, coffee, sweets, brought back or received from relatives in Palestine -, consuming popular culture such as Arab music and cinema, Palestinian folk songs and dance, keeping fiercely a social closure to outsiders while maintaining Arab forms of socialization can be seen as the unique strategies of cultural survival in a context of being forcibly uprooted and exposed to British society norms and practices, plagued by atheism and its main manifestations: sexual freedom, materialism and alcohol consumption. Consequently, efforts are made to keep the community pure of Western influence, and pressure is exerted on members of the groups - generally by the males and the elders - to conform to the community's social and moral norms and to perform their family and social duty towards their peers both in Britain and back home, which include sustaining regular contacts and showing solidarity.

Despite the distance separating members of a same family, social and economic transactions are still dense and social control of the elders can still be maintained, through the fathers, elder brothers or uncles. The regular visits mothers living in other parts of the diaspora pay to their children in Britain are efficient channels of getting relevant information that will be conveyed back home. The community regulates individual actions and patterns of behavior by representing social norms especially in gender relations. Couple affairs are the concern of the community. As an example, Ali's decision to divorce his wife encountered the disapproval of his family. Elders in Palestine and in London and Ali's friends put pressure on him not to divorce his wife. Eventually, his uncle from Palestine who had been alerted and the family elders living in England gathered in London to settle the problem, forcing Ali to remain married.

For observant Palestinians[6], Islam creates a strong feeling of brotherhood with other Muslims. Their social environment includes Muslims of diverse origins and nationalities. They interact with other diasporas such as Iranians, Pakistanis, Iraqis or Algerians with whom they socialize and sometimes get married. This is made possible on the common ground of religious values, Arabic cultural heritage and a shared political consciousness. Ayman who is married to an Algerian did not know anybody when he arrived in London as a student. He got the support of Pakistani students with whom he socialized in the university and until now most of his friends are Muslims, and not necessarily Palestinians. Talking about his Muslim friends he said:

> I must say that help came more from them than from the Arabs for example. They helped me more than Arabs do, but those Arabs, I am talking about mostly… I am talking about people who were born here. And this is what you get if you bring up your children in a foreign country, you kind of lose your cultural values. They don't feel any moral commitment towards me, you know, they don't feel they have to help me because I am Arab. They're materialistic. (Ayman, London, 19 March 2005)

As it appears in Ayman's categorization of Arabs born in the diaspora, parents fear their children will lose their sense of belonging to the Arabic community and their commitment to their country. For observant Muslims like Ayman, preserving their children from the loss of religious values is a real concern.

This is not our home: cultural strategies in education

Second generation Palestinians find themselves caught between the local traditions their parents try to transmit and some more or less ambivalent relation and membership to the British society. Hind invests a lot of energy in forging her children's Palestinian identity:

> I'm trying to make clear to the children that this is not our home. They know that when I say 'home'[al-blad] it's not here…you know not Manchester or not England. (Hind, 21 October 2004, Manchester)

Prior to moving to Britain, Hind and her husband lived in the United States. Distance and difficulties for family members in Palestine to get visas for the United States weakened physical connection with the family. Migration to England has been a way to get closer to home and to tighten

the links with the family, and consequently facilitated the children immersion in a community of kins:

> We came because England close back to home, the distance also; so a lot of visitors came to visit us so the children they know a lot more about the family. We always spoke Arabic at home, and we have always friends coming and the kids they knew that this is their background and they listen to the news a lot here because we have the Arabic channels. […] We try because in America nobody came to visit us, they couldn't. (*ibid.*)

Teenagers sometimes can hardly fit their parents' expectations in terms of sense of belonging as they have multiple allegiances that lie outside the boundaries of the community, at school, in sport clubs or within social networks of friends and classmates. They manifest sometimes some embarrassment when addressed to in Arabic, some of them even refusing to speak Arabic and replying in English. Many families decide to send the children back home or in an Arab country to complete their education when they reach "the critical age" as defined by Ayman:

> When their environment will leave all prints on the children personality. So for example my friends who were born here… [hesitating] many times they agree with what's happening in Iraq for example, they do have different views... they speak very broken Arabic… and you know they drink, have boyfriends and girlfriends, all this kind of stuff. (Ayman, London, 19 March 2005)

Children exposure to Western influence and the consequent loss of Arabic cultural values (warmth, solidarity, the respect of elders' authority, the preservation of women's chastity and modesty), and of an 'Arabic political consciousness', is seen as a threat for the group's identity. Educating the children in an Arab country is then perceived as an alternative to the risk of seeing one's children perverted by Western cultural models of consumerism, materialism and individualism. Parents often express their wish to see their children marry inside the Muslim or the Arab-Muslim community, and in that case brides are preferably chosen among cousins or in social networks in different segments of the Palestinian diaspora.

Preserving roots versus social integration

Cultural closure coexists at various degrees with social and economic integration that are seen as positive and important to achieve, in the perspective of increasing the social and economic capital of the family in the country of migration and back home. Being graduated from a European university, achieving economic success and getting residency rights increases the social prestige of the family and the chances to contract marriages with respectable families. While most Palestinians are restricted in their mobility, being stateless or holding travel documents, the acquisition of the British citizenship is seen as primordial in the creation of transnational practices. It implies freedom of movement that facilitates the fostering of social and economic ties for the holder and assures the offspring the possibility to get an education in the West while the family has returned to the Middle East.

Educated Palestinians, young professionals and students are more likely to be socially and professionally exposed to an international environment and it might encourage them to integrate. Their social interactions with the British society are sometimes instrumentalized in their discourse as practices of integration one has to go through when settling down in a new country:

> Maybe this is not the case for older generation. Us we start to find the need. Because we have to live in this country for a long time and we have to share their…kind of interest. So we talk about…even though I don't know about English football clubs… I ask them questions to engage in the discussion. But still, after all this if I am tired and I want to relax I will not think of my English friend, I will always think of my Sudanese friends, or my Palestinian friends, or Algerian friends. […] This is something that is part of the integration. (Ayman, *op.cit.*)

In his statement, Ayman distinguishes two types of socialization: relations to the host society which are part of a strategy of integration, and relations to community members that provide feelings of closeness and friendship.

Gender and migration

The recomposition of gender relations and roles in migration has been addressed by Abdulrahim (1993) in her study of Palestinian refugees from Lebanon in Berlin. Although the population she studied is quite different than the one I studied, who is more heterogeneous and adopts various

degrees of cultural conservatism, some similarities can be noted. As it has been observed in Berlin, Palestinians in Britain operate a reconstruction of the 'Palestinian woman' who has to be preserved from a morally loose Western society. Western women, especially non married - including the ethnographer - are seen as dangerous, their sexuality devastating and it has hence to be bounded. Social control through physical separation from married men and ostracization is used in order to render the endangering women sexually harmless. On the other hand, transgression of sexual barriers is possible for young men who can enjoy sexual freedom before marriage and mix socially with female comrades in the host society. Some young Palestinian men prefer to delay the age of marriage and benefit from this freedom, even though they tend to depict these practices in negative terms. They can during these years of immersion in the dominant sexual culture contract a marriage with a British woman, which will grant them residency rights and British citizenship. Some will pragmatically consider it as a step in their strategies of integration and some may divorce and marry a Palestinian or any other Arab woman to fund a family and lead a life according to traditions.

In many households I have visited, there is a clear spatial separation in the domestic space between men and women among the first generation, while younger Palestinians adopt less rigid norms: wives generally sit near their husbands and do not engage in private conversations with male members of the assembly. Women have to deal with social pressure to reassert the values and norms of the community: modesty, chastity, cultural purity unaltered by Western influence. Their domestic role cannot be played easily as they are deprived of the resources they could enjoy before the migration, through family and community support. Their mobility is restricted in the public space which is male dominated, and the ones who do not work and have a limited command in English have a least contact with the host society while their subordination to their husband has increased. They can no longer enjoy the mobility they were used to in the village, the neighborhood or the refugee camp: being anonymous in a British urban context means that no social control or protection can be provided by the community in the public space. In that context the honour of the community can be easily endangered and this lack of protection can be a source of anxiety for Palestinian women. For all these reasons, women seem more vulnerable and alienated by the dominant culture than men are, having to face the challenges of preserving and asserting tradition while being confronted to cultural difference. Similar observations have been made among Palestinians in the United States (Cainkar, Christison 1989), and Germany (Abdulrahim 1993). A student from Bethlehem newly arrived in Manchester expressed her fear to walk on her own in the city at night:

> In Palestine I feel safe, you can't be attacked there. People know that if somebody attacks you, it is not a problem between me and him, but between the two families, and his family can lose a lot. (Lina, Manchester, 21 June 2004)

Some women expressed the feeling of being looked down by the host society, being labelled as "backward" in the Western conception of womanhood. They responded in various ways by the assertion of their identity. Some of them tend to stand defensively on their cultural difference and refer to it as a source of pride. Farah came with her husband to London as a student. Prior to that, they spent a few years in Canada, where Farah's brother-in-law had already settled. When asked about her experience in Canada, she reported the negative experience of being categorized pejoratively by some Western women. Her reaction was to return to her roots by cooking traditional recipes, (while she never cooked before, being the youngest of three sisters), and performing her own culture:

> She [one of her Canadian acquaintances] never could grasp the concept that we can be at the same time in the tradition, and modern. I decided I will show her who I was through my cooking. It was a way to show them I was better than what they thought, better than them. (Farah, London, 4 December 2004)

Journeys between locations, albeit to contract marriages, alliances, to run business, perform family obligations, visit friends and attend weddings and funerals are not necessarily creating hybridity, and in many cases the actors involved do not seek the emancipation from roots. Many of these practices tend on the contrary to center the community on the original location of the homeland and to create bonds between dispersed communities, ensuring the material reproduction of the nation in diaspora. They serve the project of preserving the Palestinian cultural distinctiveness with an orientation of practices towards the homeland. These links to the territory lie mainly on ethnicity: the sharing of a common origin, cultural and linguistic characteristics, and on blood and descent, the family being the

main structure orientating actions and loyalties. The relation to the nation is preserved through the reassertion of a common history, Arab and Muslim culture and values, and the maintenance of kinship and solidarity networks that provide economic, social and cultural resources. Rootedness and closure, a relative orientation towards local traditions, can coexist with openness to new social practices, such as sports and hobbies, new modes of socialization outside the community, and a relative integration in the host society according to local contexts, resources available, and subjectivity. The willingness to integrate socially in the British society is influenced by personal trajectory and individual choice. Furthermore, it seems to be greatly determined by the level of individual integration in a Palestinian social and familial community. The looser the ties are, the more the individual tends to seek other forms of membership.

Cosmopolitans: transnational ties with an imagined community

Though they may keep dense and regular ties with Palestine, those who have been separated from their kins and a wider Palestinian community of neighbors and friends build somehow different bonds to the homeland, based on other conceptions of the community. Contrary to migrants from villages, refugee camps or Palestinian cities who have lived closely to an extended family and a dense Palestinian social network, migration trajectories of the Palestinian bourgeoisie and to some extent members of the urban middle-class have led to a certain disjunction with communal relationships, as a result of a long history of migration out of Palestine, or multiple consecutive migrations. The social context before migration, especially in terms of class, and the ability to mobilize economic and social capital (mainly through kinship solidarity) are here determinant in the nature of ties that will be constructed. These Palestinians - highly skilled professionals, businessmen, academics, students, artists - were generally integrated in international and cosmopolitan social networks prior to migration. They do not constitute a homogeneous social category in itself. They may come from the West Bank, Israel, the Gaza Strip, the Gulf countries or were born in a Western country. Their social and economic trajectories, their cultural background and their legal status may vary, but they nonetheless constitute the more privileged strata of the diaspora.

Cosmopolitan worldviews and internal differentiation

Palestinian elites would refer to Palestine as their country of origin, and their different levels of connectivity with the homeland articulate with an encompassing identity and self identification as 'citizen of the world', 'cosmopolitan', or 'international'. They express their taste for cultural difference, through travel, interest in different cuisines, Western arts consumption, and they often refer to the world they inhabit as multicultural. They accordingly refer to their ability, based on their knowledge and experience, to enjoy cultural difference and to take some critical distance from cultural practices and values they consider 'traditional' in the context of the refugee camps, The Occupied Palestinian Territories, and among 'traditional' Palestinians in Britain. While this position allows expressions of reflexivity and subjectivity alongside with a Palestinian sense of belonging, it is also the manifestation of class consciousness through the assertion of cultural difference vis-à-vis other Palestinians (refugees and 'natives'). Ayman, a member of an upper class family of the Palestinian political establishment was born and brought up in Syria. He visited Gaza for the first time when he was twenty years old. He reported this first visit as a chock. He portrayed Gazans as Palestinians of the inside, who do not have any contact with the exterior and who keep a traditional way of life and are sometimes backward in their mode of thinking. This distinction is the assertion of Ayman's belonging to the diaspora *versus* the inside, but as well to a cosmopolitan elite, in contrast with rooted Palestinians of the inside or refugees in diverse countries of settlement. This example illustrates how boundaries are made and transformed between segments of a national community in a context of diaspora. These cosmopolitan worldviews are based on social and economic capital saved during migration and sometimes acquired in the process of migration. In the latter case, people who moved upwardly have shifted from a rooted identity to a cosmopolitan one that they recognize as the counterpart of their upward social mobility.

The physical disconnection from the territory and the community of kins increases the relevance of cosmopolitan aspects in the subject's self identification. These Palestinians tend to construct a link to an imagined community, based on a symbolic and sometimes romanticized idea of the homeland and the nation. Membership to community is created according to resources available in local settings and at a transnational level.

Cultural politics and transnational solidarity

Relation to Palestine and its cultural heritage can be highly creative and involve both aesthetics and politics in initiatives where they often interwave. Mariam and Nabil, a well-established couple of professionals from Kuwait, have created a rich social life both in the UK and in Palestine, and campaign actively for the recognition of their national rights. Their social status as established professionals affords them a social and symbolic capital which facilitates the creation of ties with organizations and charities in The Occupied Palestinian Territories, the UK, or in refugee camps in Jordan. The links they have created in the British local community - with the mayor, religious representative of the Anglican Church, the local branch of a trade-union, pro-Palestinian advocacy groups, and so forth - provide valuable support in organizing solidarity actions for Palestine at fundraising events, peace walks, cultural festivals or raffles. Palestinian handicraft, such as embroideries and carved olive wood, are sold, Palestinian poetry is read, *debka* folk dance is performed, Palestinian films are screened and Palestinian food is consumed. This cultural politics creates spaces of encounter within the wider British civil society and in relation with Palestinian communities worldwide through alliances with trade-unions, women's organizations and Palestinian community centers. The couple visited The Occupied Palestinian Territories in 2000 after more than thirty years of absence, consequent to the Six-Day war and their ensuing difficulty to enter the country.

Mariam and Nabil value their Palestinian cultural heritage through the celebration of the pre-48 memory of the *fellahin*[7], and the Palestinian material cultural such as handicraft and cuisine*:* a folklore that for the Palestinian bourgeoisie embodies the belonging to a national community and its past (Said 1986: 14, cited by Bowman 1994). They combine a strong sense of belonging and a commitment to the Palestinian cause with cosmopolitan practices and values. The decoration of their house mingles with a refined taste Palestinian handicraft, embroidered shawls and cushions, carved wood, ceramic, with design furniture. They enjoy Arab food, and are as well keen on French and Italian cuisines. They display a certain taste for Western music and literature, fine arts, practice sea diving, tennis and acupuncture, and fancy going for a ride on their English collection car. They acknowledge their constant shifting between different worlds and identify with an upper class culture, which they express in terms of choice and affinity. Son of a diplomat, Nabil has lived all his life on the move and defines himself as a transnational. Born in Kuwait, he spent his childhood in Egypt, completed his higher education in France and Italy, was trained as a doctor in Ireland and finally moved to Scotland and Britain. The political and social ties the couple has forged are not based on blood and nationhood, but affinity. Drawing on her own experience, Mariam once expressed why according to her Palestinians do not form a community in Manchester:

> We don't gather according to nationality, it is a racist conception, but affinity. Palestinians here come from different social contexts and different places, most of them did not emigrate as whole families as you can find in the States. In some cases whole villages have migrated, but you don't have this here. If you look well, you will see how easily Palestinians can switch from one cultural context to another, feel as comfortable in their own milieu than in the British society. (Mariam, Manchester, 1 August 2004)

Hybridity as a restless condition

For many Palestinians, being a 'transnational' is far from representing an idyllic condition. Feelings of alienation, liminality, being caught between two worlds, 'out of place' as Said has coined it (1999), relate to the impossibility for the subject to totally fit in a social context. Said describes the particular situation of the intellectual in exile as follows:

> (...) The state of never being fully adjusted, always feeling outside the chatty, familiar world of inhabited by natives...Exile for the intellectual in this metaphysical sense is restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others. (Said 1994:39)

Munir, an academic from Jerusalem who settled in London, has since been involved in a pro-Palestinian advocacy group in the UK. Being already a long-term activist in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, he relies on both local and transnational links with global solidarity movements. He defines himself as a "cosmopolitan", identifies with the community of third-world intellectuals who are exposed to Western values of human rights and democracy, and takes in the same time critical stances towards both the West and his country:

> Even in Palestine I don't feel one hundred percent in my place. I am not like the people who came here to work from their village and are busy to earn their living and want to keep their culture. I am coming from a cosmopolitan city where I have been already socializing with people from everywhere. And because of my position as an intellectual, I am very critical to society here and in Palestine. (Munir, London, 9 June 2005)

Hybridity perceived as alienation leads to the unsettling experience of spatial and inner dislocation, the subject having to shift constantly between different localities and social contexts. When asked to situate himself spatially, Munir expressed his confusion:

> I live here and there… I don't see myself living here nor there… No: I live here and visit there. I feel I have to have this connection with the homeland, the family, the friends. It's schizophrenic.

Ahmad is studying at the University of Oxford and was born in London from a Palestinian father and a British mother. The first time I contacted him by email soliciting an interview he replied:

> You should be aware I am only 'half Palestinian', my father is Palestinian and my mother English and I was born and brought up in London, I don't even speak Arabic! (Ahmad, email 2 December 2004)

When we met for the first time, he renewed his warning, saying that he was not "a real Palestinian" and did not know whether he could help me. When asked how he identified, he stated:

> I don't know... nothing...Londoner maybe...it's easier London, it's multicultural...it's a mixture... (Ahmad, Oxford, 3 February 2005)

During the first year we met and had regular exchanges on politics, identity issues and Palestine, he tried to accommodate a fragmented self with a hybrid self-perception, which he defined as liberating in opposition to a community-imposed fixed identity in reference to roots:

> I don't have… [any sense of belonging] it is liberating rather than having one identity drawn from an origin or a family….I always felt as an international…(Ahmad, London, 2 April 2005)

In that sense, London represents the place where hybrid selves can melt in a multicultural context:

> I think maybe London accommodates my lack of sense of belonging I have to one particular culture. It means I've always been able to get along with people from different backgrounds very well, better than other English friends…and maybe the empathy with people who don't belong here…

I met Ahmad at a moment of his life when a great inner transformation was occuring in his self-representation. I will describe later in this essay how new configurations in his experience of otherness lead him to identify with (not without any ambivalence) to a national community and its cultural roots.

Gender, class and the self

The experience of Randa highlights the interplay of gender and class in the relation to community and self-definition. She was born in Britain and brought up in Syria until the age of eighteen when she moved to Canada to further her education. "Not really an Eastern woman" yet having a part of herself she cannot "share with English people", her self-representation is fragmented, contradictory, hyphenated. Her inability to enact fully her palestinianness according to social and cultural norms led her to take some distance from the community:

> I am aware of the gap between my natural behaviour, what I wish has become my natural behaviour and the expectations that Arabs have, and so I avoid problems by staying away, by not getting too close, because I predict I will have difficulties. (…) It is the way I deal because I understand that actually I'm not really an Eastern woman in the correct way. In my allegiance, my political allegiance and emotional allegiance, it's Palestinian…But I am aware I grew up, I lived a lot of my life in the West and I am also a Westerner." (Randa, London, 13 August 2005)

When she came back to Britain after her graduation in Canada, she intended to get involved in politics in the General Union of Palestinian Students in London. The cultural gap she faced with other Palestinians resulted in a failure. Having stayed too long far from the community, she did not

integrate nor represent in her way of life social and cultural Arab norms concerning gender roles:

> I don't fit the type that men would be able to relate to me. I'm not married, I'm single, I'm professional I'm all these things. I don't want to have problems with them, I know that a lot of Arab men find it really difficult to take orders from an Arab woman or deal with an Arab woman on an equal footing, and I will not risk putting myself in that position, because it has happened to me before and it was a disaster.

She nevertheless feels a deep political consciousness and commitment to Palestine, and a sense of a shared origin with her country fellows, which provides her, even fugitively, with a sense of feeling home:

> It is really nice when you meet people who are from your country, even if I've never been in their real culture, because you know I'm not really English and although I live very integrated and very assimilated I feel there's a part of me that I can't share with English people and when I meet Arabs, you know it's almost, it feels like coming home.

Concurrently, Randa expressed a strong class consciousness, belonging to the traditional rural landowner bourgeoisie. Migration from the homeland has resulted in a reconfiguration of class structures in the diaspora and some families have lost in this process their social prestige and social status. Class boundaries became in a way more porous and mobile as social differentiation has recomposed. Some families might have socially moved upwardly or downwardly, and in the UK the social space is not systematically segregated according to Palestinian traditional class structures. It then becomes sometimes more difficult to situate somebody in terms of class:

> Here we are out of place and out of context. And so when I meet people I don't know whether they're going to see me the way I see myself in terms of social context because I don't know what their social context is.

She then reflected on her failure to join the Palestinian community in London not only in terms of gender relations but as well of class:

> I spent most of my time fighting with people and having troubles, people causing me problem. I was having to deal with people that my mother would call "low class" and who behave badly. And I was trying to treat them like equals what make them respect me less.

Randa responded to her failed insertion in the local Palestinian community by furthering her political commitment in the British society where she had more successfully integrated. She shifted from community politics to political aesthetics, writing political plays she creates in British theaters with British actors.

The sentiment of being in a state of liminality and in inadequacy to social situations tends in the cases I have presented to favorize an extreme investment in self-definition. The subject moves from a fixed definition, ascribed by birth, the family or biological characters that fund ethnicity, to a fluid, created and transformed identity. This process is particularly salient among second generation Palestinians, like Randa and Ahmad, and can be the result of rebellion, perception of being inadequate to specific social settings or ascribed definitions. Such process of self-definition through identity border-crossing seeks to resolve the tension of being perceived as different by the wider society, yet identifying to a certain extent with it, being told by the community of Palestinians that they are Palestinian, and experience rejection as Randa did, while they may have diverse levels of connectivity with the members of the community and Palestine, and sometimes little knowledge of the culture. This creates the tension of being told who they are by both the dominant society in negative terms, and by the family without - as Ahmad has stated it - "being given the resources" that would make the identification possible. Furthermore, the essentialist discourse of the sometimes culturally resistant parents who fear to see their sons being assimilated in the dominant culture, clashes with the narcissistic selves of the ones who have been brought up in a Western context, and with a multicultural model they sometimes interpret in cosmopolitan celebratory terms.

Antagonism and the making of identity

The other source of tension resides in the traumatic experience of being negatively constructed in the dominant narrative. This led Ahmad to perceive his palestinianness during his childhood as a "source of shame and embarrasment"[8], and try to identify as a British boy. Having moved from London to Oxford where he started his higher education, he was confronted in the university to a political context where he had to face Zionist narratives. He progressively developed a Palestinian identity based on a growing political consciousness of being misrepresented and his national rights being denied. His interest in Palestine grew and he visited his family in Palestine twice during the year, started a correspondence with his cousins, to learn Arabic and to socialize with Palestinian and Arab students in Oxford. Being an active member of a Palestine student society in Oxford, he participated in the Israeli Apartheid Week 2006 that was launched in Oxford along with other universities in Canada, facilitated by political ties one student member of the society had made during his undergraduate studies in Toronto[9]. The event was launched for the 30th Anniversary of the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, and was held simultaneously in Oxford and other cities in Canada (Toronto, Montreal, and Kitchener-Waterloo). In a speech he gave during the event, Ahmad described the process of his identity transformation as a shift from complicity with "Western prevailing narratives" to a "rebellion" against them, inspired by the similar experience Ghada Karmi describes in her autobiography (Karmi 2002):

> I speak about this early part of my childhood in a talk on Palestinian resistance because as Ghada Karmi's story demonstrates, for many of us growing up in the West, the road to resistance seems to often start with embarrassment of the very identity later trumpeted for the cause. (…) These negative reactions to Palestine which had once deterred me from associating myself with my roots now provoked me into a rebellion that I continue today.

As Bowman suggests, the manifestation of antagonism is a determinant factor in the discursive construction of a collective identity (Bowman 1994). Here the assertion of one's national identity is rendered possible by the extension of the subject's experiences of antagonism to a collective one. This process is clearly articulated in Ahmad's discourse:

> I began to realise that in British and Western discourse a silence hung over not only the tragedy Israel was inflicting on Palestinians but Palestine and Palestinian identity in general. Far from benign, this silence became increasingly deafening and it was in my mid-teens when I realised that it was a direct attack on the legitimacy of my Palestinian identity and by extension the legitimacy of Palestinian national aspirations.

The students who participated in this panel presented like Ahmad a counter-hegemonic narrative of resistance, and displayed criticism of the Western prevailing power of narration which negatively constructs and categorizes 'the other'.

Transnational politics or the discursive hegemony of the cosmopolitan patriots

Diaspora politics is made of social spaces where all communities can potentially - and sometimes actually do - interact, meet, engage discussion and confront each other. These moments of contact are revealing class divide and contrasted political views fragmenting the diaspora. There are as well moments of communion around folklore festivals as *Debka* dance, Eid religious festivals, events celebrating common cultural heritage, or gatherings commemorating the Deir Yassine massacre, the *Nakba,* or the leader Yasser Arafat. Students like Ahmad find a channel to express their Palestinian identity that can accommodate their diverse experiences and self-perceptions in a cosmopolitan atmosphere.

Palestinian groups are under-represented in pro-Palestinian activism in the UK, and community-based organizations have a limited impact on the diaspora politics. They rarely succeed getting visibility in the media or reaching a wider audience than the Palestinian communities themselves. Their members do not necessarily have the political culture of constructing alliances outside the community and their political praxis tends toward communalism. Community associations such as the Association of Palestinian Communities in the UK, based in London, as well as organizations such as Al Awda and Palestine Return Centre are working towards the preservation of Palestinian national identity and the recognition of Palestinian national rights of self-determination and the right of return. They organize cultural events, talks and demonstrations that seek to tighten links among Palestinians

in the UK and raise awareness in the British society about the Palestinian struggle. Al Awda and Palestine Return Centre have a more explicit political agenda and lobby the media and the government on the issue of the right of return of Palestinian refugees.

Advocacy for Palestine covers a wide range of organizations at the local and national level, which are part of broader international solidarity networks, including religious groups (Muslim, Jewish, Christian, interfaith groups), British, Palestinian and Israeli organizations such as student groups, trade-unions or peace groups. These transnational political spaces combine alliances with local political organizations and transnational solidarity networks. Concurrently, we are witnessing the emergence of new kinds of grassroots initiatives to engage advocacy for Palestine within a wider global social movement. A growing awareness of the relationship between globalization and the conflict in the Middle East is quite a new development in Palestinian grassroots politics as illustrated by recent international meetings and networking efforts between advocates for Palestine and alternative globalization movements, especially anti-war groups[10].

Cosmopolitan patriotism (Appiah 1998) is the site where belonging to a nation and hybridity can reconcile. Hybridity provides the resources that make diaspora politics successful. Cosmopolitans can reach British and international audiences on the ground of a common political praxis and social codes. They can easily build political alliances in the local civil society and in global politics relying on the multiple ties they have been able to create during their many journeys, in political and academic circles, in the UK and abroad. This elite expresses its resistance to hegemonic Western discourses that categorize Palestinians negatively as 'backward', 'terrorists', and deny the legitimacy of their national claim. The feeling of having one's identity denied explains the strong emphasis Palestinian intellectuals and activists put on identity discourse and counter-hegemonic narratives of origins and belonging to a national territory. Edward Said probably exemplifies the best these Palestinian counter-hegemonic narratives and remains an inspirational figure for many Palestinians. This narrative is at the core of the diaspora's political mobilization and its discursive practices, as it has been illustrated with the example of the Israeli Apartheid Week.

The assumption that these hybrid discursive productions create *only* resistance to hegemony has somehow to be nuanced (Smith and Guarnizo 1998: 5). Cosmopolitans may convey subaltern voices from the margins, they nevertheless are the producers of hegemonic diasporic discourses. They may be committed to resist Western biased narratives but this criticism has to be done through a homogenizing process where the elite-led diasporic political spaces exert a power of representation of the Palestinian cause and discourse of national identity. The construction and redefinition of class boundaries in this power of representation reveal homogenizing processes and the reproduction of structures of power accompanying the nation-building project.

Hybridity in that case does not coincide with the post-national since it is through hybridity that the national struggle is performed. The identities at stake here are in a way unbound, yet boundaries are created and maintained between those who have the legitimacy to represent Palestinians and those who do not. It is indeed the privilege of a small elite of established political representatives and academics, dominant political and intellectual figures, and to a lesser extent those who structurally identify with them : the Oxford students for example. Institutions such as the University of Oxford and the School of Oriental and African Studies in London are the sites where these globalizing elites form and interact. This political field dialogically structured and articulated around practices and discourses based on antagonistic representations, presents a clear tendency to exclusiveness. Indeed, to be efficient, the national struggle implies a process of othering and a construction of a national unity through a normative identity discourse. This essentializing process, positively labelled by some authors "strategic essentialism" (Spivak 1987; Fuss 1989) requires the subject to adopt an essentialized identity of 'being a Palestinian' emanating from a moral commitment and a political consciousness, and not merely from an ethnic origin imposed by birth. Hence, considering the subject's positionality in specific political contexts is determinant in order to understand the status of the various identities and discourses endorsed, specifically when dealing with collective identities (the subaltern Palestinian voice) *versus* individual identity (the fragmented/oscillating self).

The experience of Ahmad demonstrates that various identities can coexist, overlap and sometimes be successively adopted and abandoned. This "constantly changing relational multiplicity" of identity (Brah 1996: 124) needs to be interpreted and understood in the light of specific power configurations and sets of circumstances in which they emerge.

Drawing on these conclusions, I will suggest that Palestinian identity politics have to be considered in their position within global relations of power, as subjugated national discourses facing Western hegemonic representations. However, individuals and groups composing the diaspora are positioned differently in terms of cultural meaning, political identity, and access to social and symbolic resources. The relations to community and locality constructed according to these specific conditions have hence to be contextualized in the social relations of power in which such differentiated subjectivities are constituted. Accordingly, the terms of hybridity, border-crossing and displacement should be used carefully, and the phenomena they relate to should be analyzed in their conditions of emergence and reproduction as they attest that diasporas are hierarchized social spaces, internally differentiated and externally articulated with specific regimes of power and dialectics of domination. Finally, it should be reminded that borders – apologetically supposed to dissolve in the transnational moment – are too often instrument of political alienation and the ultimate reminders of the Palestinian condition:

> Even those few Palestinians who by the chance of birth, marriage, or immigration have managed to acquire United States, European, or other first world passports, find that barriers and borders remind them inexorably of who they are. (...) The border guard's ominous words "Step out of line and follow me" are depressingly familiar to Palestinians waiting their turn at these crossing points. (Khalidi 1997: 3-4)

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Notes

[1] *Nakba* means in Arabic catastrophe and relates to the experience of dispossession, and the exodus of most of the Arab inhabitants of Palestine during the war of 1947-1948 and in the wake of the establishment of the state of Israel.

[2] *Ghurba* in Arabic derives from *Gharb,* the West, i.e. the direction where the Sun sets, and means separation, remoteness and by extension exile from one's place of birth. The term was usually used by my informants to express their state of being in exile, far from home. The term has an emotional resonance of being separated from the homeland, being a stranger in an alien land. Palestinians who wanted to stress on their transnational condition rather used the term *shatât* (dispersion), the Arabic equivalent of diaspora. While the former term seemed to refer to a painful emotional experience of exile, the latter was used in a formal context to stress on the state of dispersion of the Palestinian people.

[3] Due to a lack of a comprehensive registration system, in the absence of a common definition of a Palestinian refugee, and considering the invisibility of some refugees in national censuses, figures vary depending on sources. These estimations are drawn from BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights: http://www.badil.org/Refugees/facts&figures.htm, accessed 30th October 2005.

[4] First sûra of the Qur'an pronounced for the dead.

[5] Roast meat.

[6] My research has been carried out mostly among Muslim Palestinians, who present specific modes of subjectivity and worldviews. While some observations concerning their ethnic and national feelings may apply to Palestinian Christians, my analysis do not intend to be representative of all Palestinians, but has to be understood in relation to the specific contexts described in the essay.

[7] In Arabic: peasants. The memory of the pre-48 village way of life based on kin solidarity and on the close relationship to the land and its natural resources (with the prominent symbols of olive and orange trees) has produced powerful national symbols where the territory and the community are romanticized in an ahistoric *âge d'or*.

[8] "Palestinian Resistance in British Society", speech given at the Israeli Apartheid Week, Oxford, 15th February 2006.

[9] The event was covered by the local and Israeli press. See the article by Jonny Paul: Oxford Holds 'Apartheid Israel' Week, Jerusalem Post; 16th February 2006.

[10] See Alternative Information Centre. 2004. *Globalization and International Advocacy by Palestinian and Progressive Israeli Organizations*, that surveys the current efforts of Palestinian advocates in getting involved in alternative globalization networks.